

DATSUNS

at the Glen

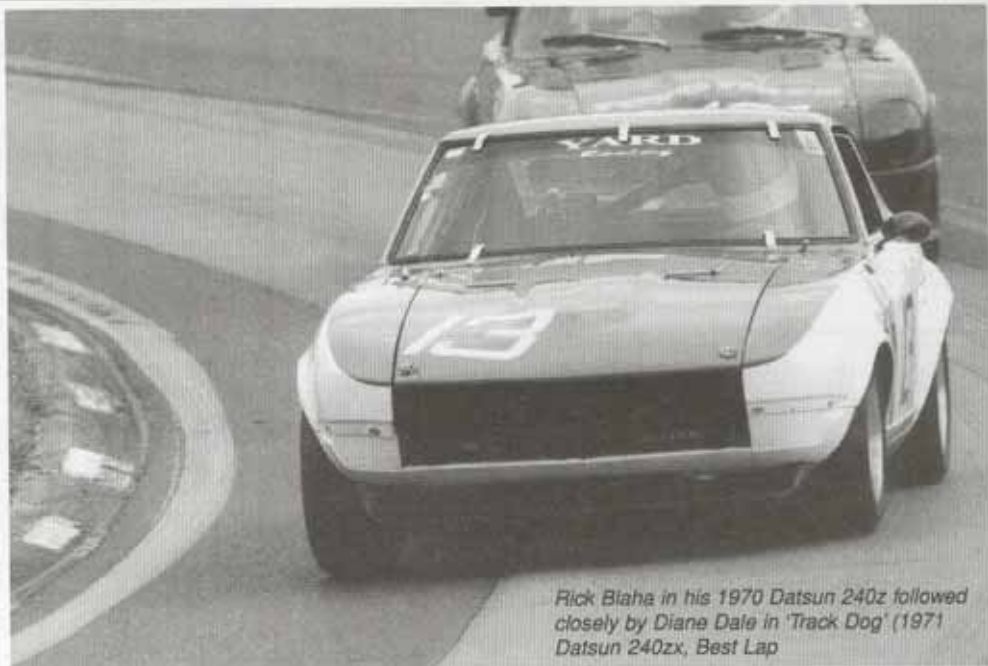
The Zippo U.S. Vintage Grand Prix of Watkins Glen

Story by Diane Dale, Photos by Gerald Dale

Well, Craig and Jim Maw sure had it right. They have long claimed that the SVRA Zippo U.S. Vintage Grand Prix weekend at Watkins Glen was THE event for vintage cars. And when Bill Dawson and I brought our Datsun 240z 'Track Dog' down there to compete last year for the first time – we were in awe. And this year – the event continued to entertain and amaze – I'm addicted now – it's in ink on my calendar for the rest of eternity.

Over 450 cars were registered for this year's event – apparently the largest gathering ever of vintage cars in North America. As a spectator (they claim 50,000 of them over the course of the 3 day weekend) there is no end to the sights and experiences. Walking through the paddock is like taking a walk through time. The majority of cars are in immaculate condition – some even in museum condition. You can see the pride of ownership in all the finer details – it's what separates vintage from regular regional racing and it's what the fans love to see. The glory being – these cars are actually raced – and raced competitively! Taken to the track are 10 groups of cars – small, regular and big bore displacement sports cars and sedans prior to 1979, formula cars prior to 1979, limited produced sports cars and racing specials prior to 1960, under 2.0 litre purpose-built sports racers, Can Am, World Championship, IMSA and FIA prototypes after 1972 and select GT Sports cars and sedans after 1972. Imagine Sprites, Minis, Alfa Romeos, every type of MGs, Fiats, Triumphs, Austin Healeys, Porsches, Elvas, Morgans, Daimler, Sunbeams, Jaguars, Maseratis, Listers, Allards, Fords, McLarens, McKees, Chevrons, Corvettes, Shelbys, Datsuns, Cobras, Mustangs, Camaros, Plymouths, Ferraris, Nissans, Toyotas, BMWs, Escorts, Mazdas, Formula Vee, 500, 5000, Atlantic, Super Vee, Continental and Formula 1, 2 and 3, and every other displacement – all in one place at one time. SIGH...

Every year, SVRA features a different era or type of car – this year's feature was a tribute to Mark Donohue. Greg Whitehead had just loaned me 'The Unfair Advantage' (a must read for anyone interested the slightest in cars



Rick Blaha in his 1970 Datsun 240z followed closely by Diane Dale in 'Track Dog' (1971 Datsun 240zx, Best Lap)

or racing!) – I was THRILLED to show up and find out that Mark's original cars were actually there. Live. In Person. I walked up to the cars and stared at them. And then stared again. Here, right in front of me was his 1961 Elva Courier. Along with that, his Lola's, Camaros, Fords, Chevrolets, Javelins, Porsches, AMCs and his official 1974 Penske PC1 Ford. For the feature race these cars all raced together on the track. Now there's a snapshot for your memory banks. A most delightful tribute – David Donohue (Mark's son) was driving the Penske PC1 Ford.

Oh... and did I mention the Datsuns? Datsun SRL311s, 510s, 240Zs, 260Zs, 280Zs and Nissan GTPs. Geneva Motorsports' Tom Fitzgerald showed up with a newly built 260z (to replace his previous 240z). Tom, Richard 'Soapy' Madia (1973 240z) and Mike Unger (1972 Datsun 240z) dominated the zed crowd with their slick modifications and well built cars. In the final race it was down to the wire for myself (1971 'Track Dog' Datsun 240z), Bill Barton (1971 Datsun 240z) and Allan Robbins (1970 Datsun 240z – an Original Bob Sharp car – Number 6 off the production line – www.zhome.com/history/sharp.htm). The three of us traded spots a couple of times and stuck together like glue the entire race. (If only someone had gotten that on camera – a great Datsun photo op!). The final race

results were Allan, then myself, then Bill, a one car break then Rick Blaha (another Datsun 240z) Talk about a lot of Datsun fun!!!

I can't emphasize enough what an experience this is. If you've never been – Watkins Glen is the town of historical racing nestled in the beauty of the Finger Lakes region in upstate New York. It's an easy five and a half hour drive from Toronto. The area has stunning scenery, many wineries, and a huge tourist appeal. The Corning Museum of Glass is not too far away (think shopping!), the International Motor Racing Research Center is hosted right in Watkins Glen and the Zippo Grand Prix weekend features many car shows, art shows, street parties and the infamous re-enactment of the original race track where 150 race cars take to the streets and stop in town for the greatest historical show and shine yet! Accommodations range from KOA camping, to stunning bed and breakfasts, to historical 'racer' lodges.

The Zippo Grand Prix is September 10th to September 12th in 2004. If you're even thinking of going – book now. (Accommodations are hard to find even as early as the spring...) It really is a vintage car lovers' paradise.

www.theglen.com • www.svra.com

Photos by Gerald Dale



Mark Donohue Original - 1961 Elva Courier MKII



Bill Barton's 1971 Datsun 240z from Columbus, OH (Best Lap 2:24.154)



Tom Fitzgerald's 1972 Datsun 260z from Geneva, NY (Best Lap 2:15.236)



Mark Donohue Originals - 1967 Lola T70 MKIIIb and 1971 AMC Javelin



Rick Blaha's 1970 Datsun 240z from West Berlin, WI (Best Lap 2:26.640)



Richard "Soapy" Madia's 1973 Datsun 240z from Geneva, NY (Best Lap 2:24.244)



Mike Unger's 1972 Datsun 240z from Gloucester Pt., VA (Best Lap 2:20.496)



Mike Goldberg's 1978 Datsun 280z from Piscataway, NJ



Restored Datsun on display downtown Watkins Glen



Henry Camfordam's 1990 Nissan R90c GTP from Cumming, GA



James Oppenheimer's 1990 Nissan R90c GTP from Chicago, IL (Best Lap 1:39.513)



Mark Donohue Original - 1969 Chevrolet Camaro Z/28



Tom Phelan's 1967 Datsun SRL-311 from Hendersonville, NC (Best Lap 2:36.454)



Edward Adam's 1968 Datsun SPL311 from Front Royal, VA (Best Lap 2:41.842)



Dick Tillinger's 1967 Datsun SRL-311 from Allegany, NY (Best Lap 2:23.735)



Don Herman's 1969 Datsun SRL-311U from Pepper Pike, OH (Best Lap 2:30.453)



Crowds in downtown Watkins Glen just before the re-enactment of the original racetrack.